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ABSTRACT

Information obtained from the 1973 Davis Student Survey regarding the experience of undergraduate students at the University of California at Davis is presented. Two types of information are provided. The first covers general issues pertaining to the selection of a college and the expected outcomes of a college education, and include sections devoted to the desired outcomes of college, reasons for choosing UC Davis, degree expectations and vocational expectations after college. The second type of information pertains to student evaluations of the campus environment at Davis including areas of needed assistance, serious problems on campus, and major sources of student satisfaction. (Author/SPG)

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UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

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FOREWORD

This is the first of three reports about the perceptions of Davis students based on information obtained by the 1973 Davis Student Survey. Both this report and the companion report, Graduate/Professional Student Perceptions, are intended to provide a general overview of student life at Davis. A third report, The Academic Environment, focuses more directly on student perceptions of the academic side of campus life.

I wish to acknowledge the valuable assistance provided by Norman Lynn Bailiff and Bob Nixon Gaines. As graduate students and staff members in this office, they were chiefly responsible for the collection and analysis of data necessary to the preparation of these reports.

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INTRODUCTION

In its first year of operation, the Office for Student Affairs Research and Evaluation undertook the task of assessing student needs and evaluating student service programs. The primary vehicle for this assignment was a large mailed survey which was known as the 1973 Davis Student Survey. Sent to a 25 percent randomly selected sample of the student population, this instrument provided a wealth of information about the Davis student.

The purpose of this report is to present a select portion of the available data. The subject is the undergraduate student. An attempt has been made to identify some of the critically important elements which provide an overview of the undergraduate's Davis experience. The information chosen for this report consists of two distinct types. The first covers general issues pertaining to the selection of a college and the expected outcomes of a college education. In this part of the report sections are devoted to the desired outcomes of college, reasons for choosing UC Davis, degree expectations, and vocational expectations after college. The other type of information included in this report pertains to student evaluations of the campus environment at Davis. Attention is focused on areas of needed assistance, serious problems on the campus, and major sources of student satisfaction.

The information presented in this report is intended to be primarily descriptive. The data is reported in percentages. For each question comparisons were made between related sub-groupings, e.g., sex, class in school, college, etc. The comparisons reported in the text are statistically significant, based on a Chi-Square test of significance employing the Yates' Correction for Discontinuity, $p < .05$. The specific Chi Square values, however, are not presented.

METHODOLOGY

The 1973 Davis Student Survey was developed by a team of student interns during the 1972-73 academic year. Employed by the Office for Student Affairs Research and Evaluation, they worked closely with a consultant from Educational Testing Service, Richard E. Peterson, in devising and administering the instrument. The Survey consisted of four distinct forms, each eight pages in length. The four forms were comparable in appearance and format; all the questions were multiple choice, with spaces provided for additional written comments. With the exception of the cover sheet, the demographic questions (p. 2 of each form), and the questions on peer advising and counseling programs (pp. 6 and 7), however, each form contained unique items.

In order to obtain a maximum amount of data at a minimum of inconvenience to the students being sampled, a matrix sampling procedure for distributing the Survey was employed. In the third week of May, each form was mailed to a different computer-selected random sampling of 1,000 students from the total student population. For the purposes of the Survey, the population was defined as every student who had registered for the spring quarter, prior to the first day of instruction. This sampling included individuals enrolled in the three undergraduate colleges, the graduate and professional schools, and the Division of Extended Learning. One week after the surveys were sent out, the students in the sample were sent postcards reminding them to return the completed questionnaire.

A total of 1,875 questionnaires were returned out of the 4,000 that were sent out. The return rate for the entire Survey was 47 percent, with the return rate for individual forms ranging from a low of 44 percent to a high of 49 percent. This low rate of return, while not affecting the validity of the obtained results, does not enable one to conclusively apply these results to the total student population.

BACKGROUND DESCRIPTION OF THE UCD UNDERGRADUATE

The University of California at Davis is one of nine campuses within the University system. At Davis, three out of every four students on campus are enrolled in one of the undergraduate colleges. In the fall of 1973, there were 11,678 undergraduates with 60 percent in the College of Letters and Science, 32 percent in Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, and 8 percent in Engineering. The majority of new undergraduates come to Davis immediately after high school, but a sizable number (43 percent) transfer to Davis after completing work at another college.

The undergraduate population at Davis is 54 percent male and 46 percent female. While women slightly outnumber men in the entering freshman class, the higher number of men in the total population can be directly attributed to the fact that 59 percent of transfers are male. The single largest class is the junior class, which accounts for 36 percent of all undergraduates; seniors and freshmen each make up about 22 percent, while the remaining 20 percent consists of sophomores. In terms of academic majors, the most popular area of study is the Biological Sciences, with nearly one-third of all undergraduates enrolled in one of its seven disciplines. The Social Sciences and Engineering follow in popularity, together accounting for somewhat more than one-fourth of all newly admitted students.

A DAVIS EDUCATION

When the Davis campus began around the turn of the century as the University Farm, there was not much confusion about why students came to Davis or what they expected to do with their education. As an agricultural institution established to serve the needs of the rural population of California, the campus provided students with practical knowledge about soils, crops, and animals. At the conclusion of their studies students were then expected to apply this information to improve their own agricultural situation back home.

Questions concerning student expectations of a Davis education, if raised on the campus today, would no doubt elicit a different set of responses. A Davis education is no longer completely agricultural, nor do students attend for the same reasons as their predecessors. Their reasons for attending college and their expectations of the value of college are probably as diverse as the many academic areas in which they study. The following sections from the Survey attempt to examine this heterogeneous mixture more closely. First, the reasons students give for attending UC Davis are examined. Then follows a brief look at the desired outcomes of a college education. The final two areas present student degree expectations, as well as vocational expectations after the completion of college.

Reasons for the Selection of UC Davis

In the Survey a sample of respondents were asked to select the three most important reasons for choosing the Davis campus. Table 1 presents a compilation of these reasons for freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

TABLE 1

Undergraduate Reasons for Choosing
UC Davis, Spring 1973
(in percent)

Reason	Frosh (N=75)	Soph (N=77)	Jr (N=114)	Sr (N=112)	Total (N=378)
General campus atmosphere	67	77	65	56	65
Get a good education there	49	53	51	55	52
Good academic reputation	48	36	49	33	41
Special strength in intended major	37	25	33	33	32
Close to home	33	32	29	19	28
Would be intellectually challenging	13	21	12	16	15
Other	8	13	15	20	15
Far from home	17	14	10	18	14
Parents expected me to	9	6	10	9	9
Friends were coming here	4	0	5	11	5
Offered financial support	4	6	3	2	3

It is apparent from Table 1 that undergraduates choose to attend Davis mainly because of campus atmosphere. Following this, students most often indicated reasons which were academically related. Over one-half of the sample selected Davis because they thought they could get a good education, four out of ten because of Davis' good academic reputation, and nearly a third chose Davis because of its special strength in their intended major. Forty-nine percent of the respondents noted that the proximity of the campus to the students' home--either near or far--was a reason for selecting UCD.

An additional analysis of the data revealed a number of significant differences between groups determined by sex, college, and admission status. Women, for example, stressed the importance of the campus atmosphere more than men. Students in the College of Letters and Science also stressed the environment to a greater degree than those students in Agriculture and in Engineering. Students in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, on the other hand, placed a greater emphasis on selecting Davis because they felt they could get a good education and because of the special strength in their intended major. This same emphasis was also true for students transferring to Davis as compared to those "native students" who entered right after high school.

Desired Outcomes of a College Education

While the presence of a campus nestled serenely in a quiet rural setting may be most instrumental in attracting undergraduates to Davis, their reasons for attending college go beyond this. A sample of the respondents to the Survey were asked to rate the relative importance of a series of possible college outcomes. A ranking of results on the basis of their being "of great importance" reveals some insights into the question of what students want out of college.

Contrary to the commonly expressed belief that students come to college to obtain a better job, the three outcomes thought to be most desirable to the undergraduates were all related to personal-intellectual development. Three-fourths of the students thought "to improve your ability to think and reason" was an outcome of great importance. Similarly, 70 percent felt their choice had been made "to broaden your intellectual interests," while an almost identical number (69 percent) perceived the development of personal independence and a sense of self-confidence to be of great importance. The learning of specific skills useful in an occupation ranked fourth in importance among slightly more than six out of every ten students.

The ranking of these first four outcomes underscores a point about the aspirations of college students which should be emphasized. Students seem to perceive college as being a place for personal and intellectual development. Vocational development, though important, does not appear to be primary in the minds of students who choose to attend UC Davis.

Degree Expectations

The intellectual interests of Davis undergraduates, reflected in their responses concerning the desired outcomes of college, are further exemplified by the large number of students planning some form of post-graduate educational experience. Presented in Table 2 is a breakdown, by class, of the highest degree expected.

TABLE 2

Highest Degree Expected for
UCD Undergraduates, Spring 1973
(in percent)

Degree	Frosh (N=283)	Soph (N=274)	Jr (N=396)	Sr (N=417)	Total (N=1,370)
Bachelor's	38	38	33	35	36
Master's	23	25	30	28	27
- Academic	(18)	(21)	(24)	(25)	(23)
- Health	(5)	(4)	(6)	(3)	(4)
Doctorate	25	23	22	23	23
- Academic	(8)	(11)	(5)	(10)	(8)
- Health	(17)	(12)	(17)	(13)	(15)
Law Degree	7	5	4	6	5
Teaching Cred.	7	9	11	8	9

As indicated in Table 2, nearly two-thirds (64 percent) plan some form of graduate study. An academic or health related doctorate is the objective of almost one cut of every four responding undergraduates.

Two additional pieces of analysis on degree expectations, not reflected in Table 2, should be mentioned. For one, there are significant differences in degree expectations between men and women. A greater number of men plan on pursuing doctorates and law degrees, while women seek a higher percentage of bachelor's degrees, master's degrees in the health sciences, and teaching credentials. Whether or not this situation will change as graduate and professional schools become more accessible to women remains to be seen.

The second finding relates to the fact that 46 percent of the students majoring in the Biological Sciences have plans to obtain a doctorate in a health field. Biological Science is the largest area of study for undergraduates; consequently, a significant segment of the student body is engaged in the highly competitive struggle for acceptance into the professional schools of medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine. The impact of this situation on the campus environment is expanded upon in the later section on campus problems.

Vocational Expectations

The large number of students planning on furthering their education after leaving Davis is validated by information presented in Table 3. This table contains a description of undergraduate plans for the year after graduation.

TABLE 3

Plans for Year After Graduation For
UCD Undergraduates, Spring 1973
(in percent)

	Frosh (N=74)	Soph (N=75)	Jr (N=109)	Sr (N=108)	Total (N=366)
Graduate or professional school	36	41	45	39	41
Employment in field of academic major	14	23	16	16	17
Employment in any job you can find	0	7	10	21	11
Travel	5	7	6	2	4
Uncertain	42	17	19	14	22
Other	3	5	5	8	5

As reflected in Table 3, the largest percentage of students plan to attend graduate or professional school immediately after graduation, while less than 30 percent have definite expectations for getting a job. Two clearly defined trends are evident in the percentages selecting the "uncertain" and the "employment in any job you can find" options. From the freshman year to the senior year, there is an obvious decrease in uncertainty as well as an increase in a willingness to accept any available job.

This last point--a sort of resignation to the realities of a tight job market as a student accrues educational experience--is further supported by the answers to two additional work-related questions. When asked about the probability of finding a job in their chosen field at graduation, only 16 percent of the responding freshmen said probably not. Among seniors, 38 percent responded in the negative to the same question. To a second question on whether or not the students felt they could find a job that would enable

them to have the life style they desire, the responses for freshmen compared to those of the seniors reflected the same differential. More than twice the percentage of seniors compared to freshmen thought that they probably would not locate such a job. One question that remains for further study is how this process of realization takes place.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE CAMPUS

The narrowly defined purpose of the University Farm students in the past has given way to the multitude of different purposes and outlooks held by UCD students today. This diversity is particularly evident in students' perceptions of the campus. The following section presents three kinds of perceptual material gathered from the Davis Student Survey. The findings on individual student needs, campus problems, and campus satisfactions provide added insight into the campus experiences of the Davis undergraduate.

Student Needs and Accessibility of Assistance

A substantial portion of the Survey was directed toward identifying the perceived needs of Davis undergraduates. Students were provided with a list of college student concerns and asked to indicate whether or not they had needed assistance with each concern during the past academic year. Furthermore, for each concern they were asked if appropriate assistance was accessible on the campus. Table 4 contains the specific list of concerns, the percentage of students needing assistance with each concern, and the perceived accessibility of such assistance. The concerns, for the sake of clarity, have been grouped into four areas: Academic, Vocational, Personal-Social, and Maintenance.

TABLE 4

Percentage of Students Needing Assistance and Perceived Accessibility of Assistance with College Student Concerns

	Needed Help	Accessibility of Help*
ACADEMIC		
Clarifying educational goals	56	Moderate
Planning an academic major	50	High
Selecting an academic major	39	High
Learning how to make good use of the libraries	32	High
Help with classes (tutoring)	24	Moderate
Improving study/reading skills	13	Moderate
VOCATIONAL		
Information on grad/prof schools' admission standards	50	High
Information on applying to grad/prof schools	42	High
Finding a part-time/summer job in area of anticip. career	41	Moderate
Finding a job after graduation	21	Moderate
PERSONAL-SOCIAL		
Health care	76	High
Birth control	26	High
Roommate hassles	24	Moderate
Developing interpersonal awareness/sensitivity	20	Moderate
Finding identity as a person	19	Moderate
Personal crisis	14	High
Draft and veterans	11	High
Legal	11	Moderate
Marriage or relationship problems	10	Moderate
Religious or ethical guidance	10	Moderate
Childbirth	8	High
Sexuality	6	High
Venereal disease	5	High
Abortion	2	High
Sterilization	1	High
Drugs	1	High
MAINTENANCE		
Finding suitable housing	40	High
Finding a part-time job to earn additional money	36	Moderate
Short term financial assistance - loans	20	High
Obtaining financial credit	18	Moderate
Learning how to repair your car	17	Low
Consumer information on local merchants	15	Moderate
Budgeting and managing money	10	Low
Planning good, nutritious meals	10	Low
Information on minor home repairs	8	Low
Child care	1	Moderate

*High = 100% - 75%; Moderate = 74% - 50%; Low = less than 50%

Table 4 enumerates those concerns which are most prevalent in the minds of Davis undergraduates. The need for health care was expressed by the greatest percentage of students. The other concerns affecting at least one-half of the students seem to be intimately related to present and future educational activity; these include clarifying educational objectives (56 percent), planning an academic major (50 percent), and obtaining information about graduate/professional schools' admission standards (50 percent).

A second general grouping of concerns consists of those indicated by at least 30 percent of the respondents. These include additional items pertaining to academic activity, as well as concerns with locating part-time employment and suitable housing. Forty-two percent of the sample needed help obtaining information about applying to graduate/professional schools, 39 percent needed help in selecting a major, and slightly less than one-third needed help in learning how to use the libraries. Also, students reported needing assistance in finding a part-time job either to earn additional money (36 percent) or for experience in the area of their anticipated career (41 percent). Finally, 40 percent of the students declared that they needed help in finding suitable housing.

Contained within the overall analysis of undergraduate needs presented in Table 4 are further contrasts worth mentioning. For example, there are a sizable number of concerns that more significantly affect women than men. Women reported needing more assistance in clarifying educational goals, in planning and selecting a major, in finding a part-time job to earn additional money, and in locating suitable housing. They also mentioned needing more assistance with personal crises, birth control information, and roommate problems. An examination by class level points out the following: sophomores required more help in selecting a major; juniors required more help in finding suitable housing; and seniors required more help in finding a job after graduation and in applying to graduate/professional schools. The significance of the juniors'

need for help with housing no doubt reflects the concerns of the large transfer population, most of whom enter UCD as juniors.

The accessibility of assistance as perceived by Davis students was measured on a scale that arbitrarily defined less than 50 percent as low, 50 to 74 percent as moderate, and 75 percent and above as high. Students reported few areas as having low accessibility; those areas seen as having low accessibility, such as learning how to repair your car, are areas in which University involvement is marginal. In general, services intended to meet the primary student needs were perceived as readily accessible by the majority of student respondents.

Serious Problems with the Davis Environment

While the preceding section of this report focused on individual student concerns, this portion presents a closer look at campus-wide problems as perceived by Davis undergraduates. From a listing of twenty-one possibilities, students were asked to indicate which problems were serious, which were minor, and which were of no consequence. Table 5 contains a ranking of problems based on the percentage of students who perceived each problem as serious.

TABLE 5

Undergraduate Perceptions of Serious Campus Problems
Spring 1973
(in percent)

1.	Competition in classes	60
2.	Cost of housing	43
3.	Getting to know instructors personally	38
4.	Transportation from Davis to other areas	34
5.	Quality of classes taught by T.A.'s	31
6.	Getting help in making career decisions	30
7.	Instructors who are more interested in their research than in teaching	29
7.	Getting information about specific classes before preenrollment	29
9.	Cigarette smoking in classes	28
9.	Adequacy of campus parking for students' cars	28

TABLE 5 (cont.)

9.	Bicycle/pedestrian safety on campus	28
12.	Dogs running loose on campus	27
12.	Amount of outside lighting on campus	27
14.	Cheating on examinations	25
15.	Financial poverty among students	24
15.	Thefts and burglaries in Davis	24
17.	Rapes and assaults on students	18
18.	Getting to know people of the opposite sex	14
19.	Child care	10
20.	Making new friends	9
21.	Relations among racial or ethnic groups	8

Academic concerns, which comprised the majority of students' personal needs, are also reflected in the more general campus problems found in Table 5. Three of the five most serious problems relate to the academic environment. Competition in classes was perceived to be a serious problem by six out of every ten respondents. The problems of getting to know instructors personally (38 percent) and the quality of classes taught by Teaching Assistants (31 percent) were also seen as serious concerns. The cost of housing (43 percent) and transportation to other areas (34 percent), ranked second and fourth respectively, relate directly to living in the community.

Interestingly enough, the academic concern with cheating on examinations, recently expressed by some faculty and administrators, was not perceived by students as a major campus problem. This problem ranked fourteenth overall, subscribed to by only one out of every four students. While cheating may not be a serious problem for all undergraduates, a further analysis of the data in Table 5 revealed an interesting parallel between academic competition and cheating.

Two groups expressed significantly greater problems with academic competition and cheating. Women more than men, and students majoring in the sciences (i.e., the Agricultural Sciences, the Physical Sciences and Math, and

particularly the Biological Sciences) more than students majoring in the other academic disciplines, perceived greater problems with academic competition. Though not as serious as the problem with competition, cheating also was perceived as serious by a significantly greater percentage of the women and science majors. The concern with competition and cheating was especially apparent in the responses of the Biological Science majors. The added findings that juniors--those most likely to be involved in applying to professional schools--and students planning on graduate health science degrees are also more significantly affected by cheating help to focus attention on the stress that is being felt by this substantial portion of the student body.

Sources of Satisfaction

The maintenance of quality in a learning environment requires an awareness and understanding of the positive factors as well as the negative. The preceding two sections have carefully enumerated the student concerns and campus problems. The focus of this final section is on an elaboration of those positive elements of the Davis community which students find most satisfying.

In a portion of the Survey, student respondents were asked to indicate their satisfactions with a number of aspects of University life. A four point Likert scale was employed, with choices ranging from "very dissatisfied" to "very satisfied." Percentages in Table 6 represent a combination of the "very satisfied" and "fairly satisfied" responses.

TABLE 6

Undergraduate Satisfactions with Various Aspects of Campus Life, Spring 1973 (in percent)

1. Opportunity to participate in sports and recreational activities	93
2. General atmosphere of the campus	87
3. Opportunity for a variety of entertainment (lectures, movies, concerts)	86

TABLE 6 (cont.)

4.	Parks and recreational facilities in Davis	85
5.	Health care available	84
6.	Availability of good places to study	80
7.	Freedom in choosing classes	79
8.	Opportunity to learn crafts and hobbies	78
9.	Social life	77
10.	General content of classes	76
11.	Opportunity to develop friendships	74
12.	Contact with faculty members	68
13.	Opportunity for independent study	67
13.	Opportunity to express opinion on campus and social issues	67
15.	Contacts with deans and administrators	55
15.	Availability of tutoring	55
17.	Advising in major department	54
17.	Career counseling in major field	54
19.	Opportunity to participate in campus decision-making	52
20.	Contact with non-student residents of Davis	42
20.	Size of classes	42
22.	Opportunity for practical application of what is learned in class	40
23.	Student government	37

The data presented in Table 6 clearly point out that undergraduates receive the greatest amount of satisfaction from the non-academic environment. An overwhelming percentage (93 percent) expressed satisfaction with opportunities to participate in sports and recreational activities, while equally high percentages mentioned deriving satisfaction from the general atmosphere of the campus (87 percent), the variety of entertainment (86 percent), and recreational facilities in Davis (85 percent). The fact that the environment is given as the single most important reason for selecting UC Davis (see Table 1) further substantiates the importance of the atmosphere to the Davis learning environment.

Though not among the highest sources of satisfaction, five different aspects of the academic environment were viewed as satisfactory by at least two-thirds of the undergraduates. The availability of good places to study (80 percent) and freedom in choosing classes (79 percent) ranked the highest. The remaining three included satisfaction with the content of classes (76 percent), contact with faculty (68 percent), and opportunities for independent study (67 percent).

Students were, however, mixed in their feelings about other forms of academic activity. Both advising and career counseling were judged as satisfactory by only a slight majority (54 percent) of the students. Particularly dissatisfied were students in Letters and Science as well as students majoring in the Biological Sciences and in the Social and Behavioral Sciences. Student dissatisfaction with class size and with the opportunities for practical application of what they learned was more pronounced. Each was judged satisfactory by four out of ten students. Again, students in the Biological Sciences were prominent among the dissatisfied.

CONCLUSION

Based on the views of undergraduate respondents to the Davis Student Survey, the environment is one of the most positive aspects of the Davis campus. It is the major reason students choose to attend UC Davis, as well as the source of their greatest satisfaction. Parks and recreational opportunities abound, entertainment is plentiful, and assistance with problems is readily accessible. A source of considerable support, the campus atmosphere undoubtedly makes it easier for students to deal with the stresses of academic life which, at Davis, appear to be a major cause for concern.

Those concerns thought by students to be most significant relate directly to the academic side of campus life. Academic competition was perceived as the single most serious campus problem. In addition, three of the five

most serious problems were academically related. The same picture is presented by the information on areas of needed assistance. Here again academic needs were uppermost in the minds of the respondents.

Currently the environmental supports appear to sufficiently complement the level of perceived academic pressure, as the seeming prosperity of the campus learning environment would attest. It is important that this balance be maintained so that future students will be able to successfully cope with academic stresses which seem to be inherent on a highly competitive university campus.